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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 9208  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 2915  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1988  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6312  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4317  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0981  
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0345  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000137

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SUBJECT: U/S BURNS REVIEWS SRI LANKAN PEACE PROCESS WITH  
NORWEGIAN FACILITATOR ERIK SOLHEIM

Classified By: DCM JAMES F. ENTWISTLE, REASON 1.4, B AND D

11. (C) Summary. Norwegian peace facilitator Solheim told U/S Burns that the Sri Lankan peace process is at a crossroads and that a "major step forward" is essential. Burns expressed U.S. support for the Norwegian facilitation effort and compared notes with Solheim on the efficacy and vision of various Sri Lanka politicians. Solheim will consider his visit a success if he gets agreement on dates and locations for several rounds of ceasefire talks but does not expect a lessening of LTTE violence even if talks begin. Solheim and Burns agreed a late February/early March co-chairs meeting in Colombo might make sense if there is some tangible progress in the peace process before then. Burns noted that President Bush's early March trip to India would be an opportunity for a public U.S. statement of support for the process. Solheim and Burns held a short "photo op" after their meeting and made joint statements on the need to avoid a civil war and re-start peace talks. End Summary

12. (C) U/S Nicholas Burns met with Norwegian Minister of International Development and peace facilitator Erik Solheim January 23 at the Ambassador's residence. SA DAS Gastright, Ambassador Lunstead and DCM (notetaker) sat in. Solheim was accompanied by Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar and several Norwegian emboffs/staffers.

Process At a Crossroads  
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13. (C) Asked by Burns for his overall sense of the situation, Solheim said "it is clear we are at a crossroads. We must make a major step forward or it will go down the drain." The status quo was no longer tenable. Solheim continued that his impression is that the GSL needs to develop a strategy for war or a strategy for peace but right now it has neither. He hoped to help the GSL develop a strategy for peace during this visit. Burns commented that in his meeting with President Rajapaksa (septel) earlier in

the day, the President had expressed concern that his military was too weak to take on the Tigers (Solheim will see the President January 24). Burns noted that his message to the President and other senior Sri Lankans had been threefold: the U.S. supports Norway and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), the GSL should not rise to LTTE provocations and the GSL should take and keep the moral high ground by being flexible on issues such as the venue for cease-fire talks. As Secretary Rice had noted to Foreign Minister Samaraweera several weeks ago in Washington, the GSL should not give the LTTE an excuse to go back to war by being stubborn on the venue issue.

#### Both Sides Obsessed with Venue Issue

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¶4. (C) Solheim said the U.S. position as outlined by Burns was very helpful to Norwegian efforts. On the venue issue, Solheim said it would have to be Oslo or Geneva in order to bring the LTTE on board. In his view, however, the venue issue has assumed too much importance and drawn attention from the fact that the GSL has no real plan on how to proceed towards peace once the short-term venue issue is settled. Solheim confirmed that he will see reclusive LTTE supremo Prabhakaran when he goes to Kilinochchi January 25 and noted that it is good that LTTE theoretician Balasingham ("the heavyweight thinker") will be there as well since Prabhakaran is completely isolated and has no understanding of "the South," much less the broader world. Solheim speculated that Prabhakaran has not spoken to a Sinhalese in ten years. Solheim's objective is to get Prabhakaran (and Balasingham) to agree to both the venue and principle of ceasefire talks. Ideally, he would agree to a series of talks ("since the

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first one will consist of a long recitation of Tamil grievances!")

¶5. (C) Burns and Solheim agreed that it is imperative that the GSL develop a strategy for peace and not leave the initiative to the LTTE. The GSL right now, Solheim observed, is focused on "domestic problems, but the LTTE couldn't care less." Burns agreed with Solheim's observation that President Rajapaksa means well and wants peace but has a "shallow understanding" of the ethnic issue. Moreover, the LTTE had given him absolutely no breathing space after his inauguration before beginning to take out convoys and soldiers. Burns observed that both the Foreign Minister and the opposition leader conveyed a better sense of longterm strategy and tactics than the President who came across as "vague and indirect."

¶6. (C) Asked by Burns what would constitute a successful result to his visit, Solheim said he would be pleased if he left with a commitment to several rounds of ceasefire talks with agreed dates and venues. He estimated that with willingness and commitment from both sides, the first round conceivably could be in 2-3 weeks. Solheim cautioned, however, that even with such an agreement, he would have no hope that the LTTE would scale back its campaign of violence until the talks actually started, if then.

¶7. (C) Turning to the co-chair process, Solheim said it made sense to hold the next meeting in Sri Lanka if there is enough progress to justify a meeting. That will depend on the success of his efforts over the next few days. Late February or early March could make sense. Burns noted that he could come to a Colombo co-chairs meeting at that time. Moreover, if there is progress on the ceasefire talks, President Bush could make a supportive public statement while in South Asia.

¶8. (SBU) After their conversation, Burns and Solheim had a "photo op" at which Burns made clear U.S. support for the Norwegian facilitation effort and the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). Solheim expressed his appreciation for the

support for his efforts by the U.S., the other co-chair countries and the rest of the international community. (Burns and Solheim each held individual press conferences later in the day.)

19. (U) U/S Burns has cleared this message.

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